



Legislation Text

File #: 24-2078, **Version:** 1

To: Board of Directors

From: Lewis Broschard, Chief, Contra Costa County Fire Protection District

Report Title: Report on potential annexation of the Rodeo-Hercules Fire Protection District and review of the draft service plan and fiscal analysis.

☒ Recommendation of the County Administrator ☐ Recommendation of Board Committee

RECOMMENDATIONS:

CONSIDER accepting a report from the Fire Chief regarding the ongoing discussions and processes regarding the potential annexation of the Rodeo-Hercules Fire Protection District, including a review of the draft service plan and fiscal analysis.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact from receiving this report.

BACKGROUND:

In December 2020, an annexation study was commissioned to determine the feasibility of annexing either or both the East Contra Costa Fire Protection District ("ECCFPD") and the Rodeo-Hercules Fire Protection District ("RHFPD"). The study was concluded and presented to the governing bodies of all three fire protection districts in mid-July by an external consultant group who compiled the study. The study concluded annexation was feasible and recommended that Contra Costa County Fire Protection District ("CCCFPD") pursue the annexation of both the other fire districts. The Board of Directors for each District received the consultant's report in mid-July, 2021. On August 12, 2021, the CCCFPD received a written request from the RHFPD Fire Chief to remove RHFPD from consideration in the current annexation process per direction from the RHFPD Board of Directors. In the time since the annexation withdrawal by the RHFPD, the RHFPD Board of Directors commissioned a strategic planning process to determine the options available for the sustainability of the RHFPD. Ultimately, the RHFPD determined annexation into the CCCFPD was the most suitable and sustainable option for continuation of services to the public.

Additional findings and recommendations of the 2020 consolidation study confirmed by the ongoing evaluative process undertaken by RHFPD include:

- RHFPD is a smaller district that has seen growth in property value with moderate increases in property tax revenue which are being outpaced by expenses leaving a forecasted ongoing structural deficit in the near future.

- Property tax revenues continue to be negatively impacted by the dissolution of redevelopment agencies (RDA) and the continued property development within the City of Hercules Redevelopment Area. However, RDA pass-through revenue has increased to the RHFPD.
- RHFPD cannot meet the increased call load in the communities served with existing personnel and equipment levels without relying on mutual aid and automatic aid agencies.
- RHFPD has no capacity to support extended operations within their jurisdiction.
- RHFPD has little to no ability to upstaff and provide corresponding logistical support for surge capacity during large scale events.
- RHFPD Measure O and the RHFPD Benefit Assessment District funds will continue to be committed to funding services within the RHFPD service area post consolidation.
- RHFPD and CCCFPD share battalion chief coverage as Battalion 7; without which RHFPD would be unable to provide oversight, command and control functions required for responses beyond a single unit.
- RHFPD has little to no administrative support for human resources, firefighter training, fleet maintenance, facilities, public education, or business intelligence/special project management.
- Inadequate training support and oversight at RHFPD has resulted in decreased firefighter and civilian safety, an increase in exposure to legal and regulatory risks, inadequate organizational depth and an inability to meet succession planning needs.
- The RHFPD's vegetation management program is in its infancy and is very limited.
- With very minimal ability to perform fire investigation, RHFPD has become reliant upon mutual aid from CCCFPD to subsidize fire investigations.
- RHFPD has no watercraft or ability to perform water rescue beyond minimal shore based efforts.
- Most policies and standard operating procedures are a decade(s) old, no longer relevant, or in many cases non-existent.
- With the exception of the Fire Chief, all existing full-time RHFPD personnel that desire to do so will be absorbed into CCCFPD. The potential annexations will not result in layoffs.

In February 2022, the Rodeo-Hercules Fire Protection District Board of Directors contracted with Fitch & Associates to provide a facilitated, community-driven, strategic plan as well as a Fire Administration Analysis. The final documents were presented and accepted by the RHFPD Board in October 2022.

The Strategic Plan 2022-2027 for RHFPD included the following findings and recommendations:

- Need to improve turnout time
- Need to improve fire prevention inspection and reporting processes
- Develop a Standards of Cover (SOC) document
- Explore a contract for service or consolidation with a larger fire agency
- Provide liability reduction training to all employees and board members
- Develop and maintain a two-year training plan
- Update succession planning/professional development policies
- Develop a system to review/update policies every three years
- Explore the value of mobile fire mechanic service
- Develop a community engagement plan

- Identify cost efficient measures to maintain or improve ISO protection class
- Provide fire safety education to all elementary schools and develop a junior safety group
- Partner with the high school to provide students community service opportunities at the fire stations
- Partner with local community colleges to provide fire trainee opportunities
- Develop a Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) cadre
- Explore a contract for service or consolidation with a larger fire agency

In July 2023, the Rodeo-Hercules Fire Protection District Board of Directors contracted with retired fire chief Micheal Despain (DBA: M.E.D. Enterprises Inc.) to provide assistance in developing a process to implement the strategic plan (completed in October 2022) and provide an independent review of the RHFPD long-term sustainability.

From July 2023 to December 2023, Chief Despain conducted an analysis of the agency, which included a recommended sequence of action items to provide the most efficient implementation of the agency's strategic plan. During this same time, at the direction of the Board, Chief Despain solicited the following agencies to determine if there was any interested in a possible contract for service: Alameda County Fire Department, Berkeley Fire Department, CALFIRE (SCU), Contra Costa County Fire Protection District, Crockett Carquinez Fire Department, El Cerrito-Kensington Fire Department, & Richmond Fire Department. Of these listed agencies, El Cerrito-Kensington Fire Department and CAL FIRE (SCU) were the only agencies that indicated they were willing to entertain a deeper discussion on the proposal.

In December 2023, Chief Despain provided a summary of findings from the analysis of the long-term sustainability options for the RHFPD. The analysis demonstrated a significant lack of administrative and support staff that was placing the RHFPD in significant and growing risk of legal and regulatory liability. The report also reflected approximately \$1 million in service subsidies from the CCCFPD. The solutions available to the RHFPD included an option to seek approximately \$1.5 to \$2.0 million in additional revenue to cover the support staff and/or outsourcing costs to maintain the RHFPD in its current independent configuration. A second option was to seek out a contract for service with another adjacent public safety agency. A final option was to request annexation of the RHFPD into the CCCFPD. At the direction of the RHFPD Board, staff was directed to initiate a process to seek out a possible contract for service, as well as review the process necessary to pursue a possible annexation.

During the month of March 2024, the RHFPD distributed a Request for Proposal (RFP) process to formally engage in a possible contract for fire services. The RFP was distributed statewide to increase the possible pool of public safety entities. However, at the conclusion of this process, no public agencies responded. Staff also met with the fire chief of CCCFPD and a representative of the Contra Costa County LAFCo to review the processes and steps required for annexation.

The findings of both of these assignments were presented to the RHFPD Board in April 2024. At the conclusion of the April 2024 special meeting, the RHFPD Board directed staff to begin formal discussions with CCCFPD to ascertain financial, personnel, and service delivery impacts for the proposed annexation.

During the month of June 2024, the RHFPD hosted (2) Town Hall meetings. The first meeting was hosted on June 18, 2024, at 6:00 p.m. at the City of Hercules - Council Chambers. The meeting was hosted on June 29, 2024 at 9:00 a.m. at Rodeo Hills Elementary School. Both meetings provided opportunities for community members to attend virtually or in person.

During the Town Hall meetings, online surveys were opened up for those attending (online or in person). These two surveys were closed and locked at the end of each respective Town Hall meeting. A third survey was

opened for the community through the RHFPD website and it was opened from June 18, 2024 through July 1, 2024.

The RHFPD Board of Directors is scheduled to receive a report from their consultant, their Fire Chief, and Chief Broschard regarding the financial, personnel, and service delivery impacts for the proposed annexation, including a review of the draft service plan, at their July 10 board meeting.

Following this meeting, it is anticipated the RHFPD board may take action regarding potential next steps regarding the proposed annexation.

CONSEQUENCE OF NEGATIVE ACTION:

The Board would not receive the latest information regarding this potential annexation.